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INCOMING TELEGRAM Department of State

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EXCISE

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12. WHEN [redacted] ASKED WHETHER THIEU WAS WILLING TO SERVE AS PRIME MINISTER UNDER KY, THIEU SAID THAT, OF COURSE, HE WOULD, JUST AS KY WOULD SERVE AS PRIME MINISTER UNDER THIEU. HE NEVER GAVE ANY EVIDENCE OF ANY BAD FEELING TOWARD KY.

13. [redacted] TOLD ME HE HAD FORGOTTEN THE SUGGESTION WHICH LAM HAD MADE TO HIM ABOUT BIG MINH, AND THAT LAM IN EFFECT PRODDED HIM BY TELLING [redacted] TO ASK THIEU ABOUT BIG MINH. [redacted] THEIU SAID THAT, UNDER THE NEW CONSTITUTION, THERE WAS ABSOLUTELY NO REASON WHY BIG MINH COULD NOT COME BACK WHENEVER HE WANTED TO, THAT NO CHARGES WERE PENDING AGAINST HIM, AND THAT HE WOULD UNDOUBTEDLY BE THE MOST POPULAR CANDIDATE WHO COULD BE NOMINATED. A STRONG TICKET WOULD BE BIG MINH FOR PRESIDENT WITH HUONG FOR VICE PRESIDENT. HE, THIEU, WOULD BE GLAD TO SERVE AS THE PRIME MINISTER IN SUCH A GOVERNMENT. HE IN EFFECT ADMITTED THAT BIG MINH WOULD NOT BE A STRONG PRESIDENT, BUT THE INFERENCE WAS THAT WITH THIEU AS PRIME MINISTER, THAT WOULD NOT MATTER.

[redacted]

14. THIEU ALSO SAID THAT IT WAS IMPOSSIBLE FOR ANYBODY TO BE ELECTED WITHOUT THE SUPPORT OF THE AMERICANS -WHICH CONTRASTS WITH WHAT HE SAID TO ME THIS MORNING.

15. COMMENT: I BELIEVE IT IS TRUE THAT BIG MINH IS THE MOST POPULAR FIGURE IN VIET-NAM AND THAT AN ARRANGEMENT WITH BIG MINH AS PRESIDENT AND THIEU AS PRIME MINISTER WOULD BE UN-OBJECTIONABLE FROM OUR VIEWPOINT. A TICKET WITH HUONG AS VICE PRESIDENT WOULD BE STRONG AND HARD TO DEFEAT. THIEU IS AN EXTREMELY CLEVER THINKER AND PLANNER AND HE HAS UNDOUBTEDLY FIGURED OUT THAT THIS IS HIS VERY BEST WAY TO STAY IN A POSITION OS POWER. I BELIEVE THAT HE IS PROBABLY RIGHT THAT IN A RACE

SECRET

DEPARTMENT OF STATE A/CDC/MR
REVIEWED BY [redacted] DATE 10/6/31
PORTIONS DENIED AS INDICATED

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BETWEEN KY AND HIM, KY WOULD DO MUCH BETTER. HE HAS EVIDENTLY DEIIDED THAT HE WOULD RATHER BE PRIME MINISTER UNDER BIG MINH THAN PRIME MINISTER UNDER KY, I PRESUME FOR THE OBVIOUS REASON THAT WITH BIG MINH HE COULD RUN THE SHOW WHEREAS KY IS MUCH SMARTER AND STRONGER THAN BIG MINH.

16. I RECOMMEND THAT THIS IS ONE THING WHICH THEY HAD BETTER WORK OUT FOR THEMSELVES AND THAT WE SHOULD NOT GET INVOLVED. WE ARE IN THE LUCKY POSITION THAT ANY OF THESE COHBINATIONS IS PERFEITLY SATISFACTORY FROM TUR VIEWPTINT.

17, FOREGOING IS AT THIS STAGE oNLY A REPORT OF THIEU'S STATEMENTS AND WE CANNOT JUDGE THE DEGREE OF PROBABILITY OF SUCH AN ARRANGEMENT BEING ACTUALLY WORKED OUT. WE WILL FOLLOW THIS CLOSELY, HOWEVER, AND REPORT ANY INFO BEARING ON IT.

18. AS THE DEPARTMENT REMEMBERS, IT WAS THIEU WHO CONCEIVED AND EXECUTED THE PLOT IN JANUARY 1964 WHEREBY BIG MINH AND GENERAL DON, WHO WENT TO BED ONE NIGHT WITH ALL THE LEVERS OF THE POWERS IN THEIR HANDS, WERE AWAKENED IN THE MIDDLE TF THE NIGHT AND FOUND THEMSELVES OUT OF OFFICE AND UNDER ARREST. YET IT IS TRUE THAT THIEU GOT ALONG VERY WELL WITH BIG MINH IN PREVIOUS YEARS AND MIGHT GET ALONG VERY WELL WITH HIM AGAIN IN THE FUTURE.

15. IF BIG MINH RETURNS, WE WILL CONFRONT A TOTALLY NEW SITUATION AS REGARDS THE ELECTION OF A PRESIDENT. LOOKING AT IT WITH THE UTMOST OBJECTIVITY, IT WILL BE BETTER FOR THE U.S. IN SUCH A SITUATION TO BE REPRESENTED BY AN AMBASSADOR WHO DOES NOT REPEAT NOT KNOW ALL THE PERSONS INVOLVED AS INTIMATELY AS I DO. WHEN AMBASSADOR BUNKER HANDLES IT IN AN OBJECTIVE WAY, THERE IS A GOOD CHANCE THAT HIS OBJECTIVITY WILL BE ACCEPTED BY EVERYONE. I WOULD, OF COURSE, BE OBJECTIVE TOO, BUT I AM A WARM FRIEND OF PRIME MINISTER KY, A VERY GOOD FRIEND OF THIEU, THEREFORE, WHEN THE PRESSURE BEGAN TO MOUNT, EACH MIGHT PUT OUT THE IDEA THAT HE HAD MY GOODWILL AND IT WOULD BE MUCH HARDER FOR ME TO MAKE MY OBJECTIVITY BELIEVEABLE THAN IT WOULD BE FOR AMBASSADOR BUNKER. b-1 ed

20. b-1 ed

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